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Marginal Ontologies

Challenges of a Transfeminist Anarchism

Angie Barbosa

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This paper was initially written as a presentation for the 1st Anarchist Fair in Rio de Janeiro, to which I was invited. When I wrote it, I saw it as an outpouring of my concerns in the electoral season, and as an expression of my desire and need to radicalize trans politics, and to transition radical anarchist politics. Although the piece was originally written between the two rounds of the 2022 electoral period, and its structure and basic proposal is informed by this context, I decided to update it temporally for the publication context; it has also been revised with some punctual corrections and new contributions. Even with the editing of the text for publication in Revista Tapuia, I tried to maintain some uses of the first person and the interpellations I made to the audience in the talk, as a way of preserving the effect of summoning people and anarchist organizations to take a closer look at trans/travesti experiences.

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Abstract

In this text, written as a speech for the 1st Anarchist Fair in Rio de Janeiro, contradictions of the historically predatory relationship of Brazilian democracy with Brazilian travestis and transsexuals are presented, paying attention to the ontological marginality of the travesti body under the capitalist patriarchy of white supremacy. Based on this reflection, transfeminist challenges to radical and anarchist politics are presented.

Keywords: *Travesti*, anarchism, ciscoloniality, Brazilian presidential elections.

On October 14 of this year, in the interval between the first and second rounds of the presidential elections, the 15-year-old black travesti Stéphane was found in Natal, decapitated and with her little finger missing from her left hand; a configuration of murder that can be interpreted as a reference to the body of President-elect Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. According to the *Attransparência* collective, from Rio Grande do Norte, Stéphane was a religious girl and liked to dance. I believe — and hope — that it is not news to you that we are in the most violently anti-trans country in the world, the “champion” in murders against travestis and trans women, and that these murders are among the most brutal and symbolically intense in our imaginary of violence.

This scene reveals the already too obvious fact that the fascist affection that has been labeled as “Bolsonarism” and even “antipetism”¹ for the last six years is, in fact, the continuation of a violent colonial affection of racist hatred and transmisogyny. I be-

¹ Translator’s note: “petismo” is the word used to refer to the movement supporting the Brazilian Workers’ Party (PT). “Antipetismo” refers to the opposing movement.

lieve it was no coincidence that some anonymous transfemicide decided to symbolize his hatred for the figure of Lula in the body of a young black travesti, and not in the body of some cisgender white gentleman. Stéphane's body was seen as a blank space in which masculinist frustration over current electoral political projects could be unloaded. She was the target of a generic process where neither she nor her body were a person, but an embodiment of frustrated affection and a fantasy of violence².

While it is obvious that the body of a dead black travesti is at the bottom of patriots' and conservative ladies' imaginaries, who a while ago were calling for military intervention in our streets, I have to argue that the presence of Stéphane's murder is much broader. Her body was also at the bottom of the imaginary of the electoral left which, in the name of a real politics that prioritized above all the pragmatic objective of winning votes and protecting the pathways of the current political system, lent itself to speaking the language of the "masses": a delusional language of religious fundamentalism, anti-black and anti-indigenous racism and transmisogyny. Stéphane's murder also populates the imagination of left-wing radicals who reject feminist and LGBT imaginaries of struggle in favor of a desire to perpetuate a political system founded on the monopoly of violence — whether it is State violence or revolutionary violence — in the hands of cisgender men, as radical black travesti Jota Mombaça (2016) has already denounced.

I speak of these imaginaries of violence because they constitute our political system. I speak first as a transfeminist, then as an anar-

² Educator, philosopher and master's student in anthropology (UFRGS) Atena Roveda, in a talk on "Trans Feminism", describes transition experiences as a rupture with three central markers of human authenticity and the modern conception of personhood: the name, the body, and the position in family and social relationships. This conception of personhood, on which modern stable and coherent gender identity rests, excludes tranvesti experiences from its intelligibility. The lecture is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOXxwKh4q1w&ab_channel=L%C3%BAminaUFRGS> Accessed on: 07.28.2023.

by the ciscolonial prison State between the white cisgender middle-class female constraints of public safety and black and trans social death; we need a radical structure that is able to accommodate the historical and concrete needs of transvestigender²¹ survival, measuring freedom and autonomy also in terms of possibilities for freedom of corporal modification, health care, safety and harm reduction aimed at gender transitions and the multiplication of tools for self-definition and the expression of difference; and an approach to trans life that decentralizes and collectivizes the care of our lives under constant threat, recognizing our survival strategies as subordinate forms of labor in the logic of Capital. The structures of care are central: I'm not talking about masculinist imaginaries of revolution, we travestis don't care about that. I want to talk about these DIY processes, these care networks that ensure our survival — a kind of work that, for a long time in social movements, has been feminized and violated.

I want an anarchism that is willing to take trans-travesti experiences and struggles as a reference. And the trans-travesti struggles raise for anarchism this demand of asking how to confront the barriers in our own desire and in our daily practices of gender regulation that produce dehumanization for our bodies. The trans-travesti struggles have radically redefined the concepts of solidarity and autonomy based on trans care. I believe that only intimate contact with a trans life can make us understand this care that is necessary for our existences. I ask of you this proximity.

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TEXTO COLETIVO. Carta Proposta para o Combate ao Extermínio de Travestis e Transexuais / RATTTS-PE, Pernambuco,

²¹ Translator's note: the word "transvestigender" refers to a combination of three words in portuguese: "trans", "travesti" and "gênero" [gender].

and identify with oppressive systems in order to cling on to the minimum of security — towards the construction of trans political agencies and transfeminist imaginaries beyond democracy. Travesti and transgender activists need to confront violence and build solutions for all areas of life: health, education, urban planning — the list is endless. The amount of specialized knowledge that travesti activists possess is terrifying, all tied together by a travesti existential ethic on radical vulnerability; these militant intellectuals are the most prepared people I know when it comes to handling anything. And they need the assurance that they will be provided with the organizational care structures necessary for their survival.

As an anarchist, I ask of you this unrestricted and free solidarity, a solidarity in transition with lives also in transition: an active search for the protection of these fragile trans and travesti lives. I don't want anarchist militants to think they have to radicalize travestis or organize them, but to learn from them, and perhaps transition their own organizations in the process. We must go beyond the rhetoric of “including” or “embracing” the struggles of travesti-trans people in anti-capitalist and anarchist movements, or repeating, almost automatically, the obviousness that “Capital and the State are to blame for the oppression of trans-travesti people”²⁰. We need to challenge the anti-capitalist and anarchist movements on the basis of our experiences, so that the movements feel obliged to produce concrete structures that welcome and enable a trans anarchist struggle and the autonomy of travesti political agents.

These challenges call for an anarchist movement capable of conceptualizing anti-trans violence as a collective responsibility — a cismasculine self-critique that recognizes that anarchism must also imply a rebellion against the violent fictions of its own gender, and a cisfeminine self-critique that recognizes the continuity produced

²⁰ Communist activist and travesti intellectual Amanda Palha has already produced valuable interpellations that similarly confront the Communist movement.

chist, and I hope it will soon become clear why I make this strategic distinction now.

You see, the trans body, the black female body, the young black body not incorporated into neoliberal markets, the disabled body and the indigenous body are some of the pillars of the “marginal ontologies” of our contemporary system of recognizing humanity — something that Sylvia Wynter anticipated a long time ago (See.: WYNTER, 1994). By marginal ontologies, I refer to ontology as that which concerns the “being” of things, and these bodies I have mentioned have their experiences marked by a precariousness in the very possibility of being, an existence permeated by the incessant violence of not being properly human and, above all, a complete denial of their political agency. I will, of course, be focusing on the marginal ontology of the travesti-trans body here, although it does not separate so much from the others and has its continuities and intersections with them.

Black feminist Joy James (2022), describing the marginal ontology of the black cisgender female body and caring, used the term “black matrix” to describe the predation of black female life and reproductivity that functions as the basis of a seesaw where the political disputes of Western nation-states take place³. I begin with her ideas in order to reflect on the marginal ontologies I have described. In all these categories, but especially at the intersections between them, the whole atmosphere of violence in our political system and its disputes condenses into real terror.

I believe that if we want to understand the challenge that marginal trans-travesti ontologies pose for anarchism, we need a

³ James' text, although only published in English, has been freely translated by the anarcho-feminist collective Bibliopreta. See: JAMES, Joy. *Afrarealism and the Black Matrix: Quilombo Philosophy on the Frontier of Democracy* [2013]. Bibliopreta, 2022. (Original Title: *Afrarealism and The Black Matrix — Maroon Philosophy at Democracy's Border*). Available by copyleft at: <<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fkrbw14MJu-dtyR1wYZp0TwNZsWqjeVz/view?ths=true>> Accessed on: 28/07/2023.

bit of history. Sorry if I am being too theoretical, I will make sense of it soon.

But I feel that we have to understand that, in order for a movement of transsexuals and travestis to exist, the trans-travesti identity had to be defined at a dangerous political crossroads. This crossroad was the position of a complex subject of public policies and what some authors have called “tutored empowerment” (CARVALHO and CARRARA, 2013), especially between two sets of State apparatus: security and health; but also, later, a more abstract administrative bureaucratic apparatus.

I would like to briefly return to some historical scenarios of the Brazilian trans-travesti experience, to explain the effects of these apparatuses on trans life.

The first takes place in the mid-80s. The travesti Brenda Lee, a northeasterner who moved to São Paulo and made her living as a prostitute, begins to welcome travestis into her home, which would later be called “Palácio das Princesas” [The Palace of Princesses]. Brenda Lee’s agency as an activist was relentless. She took in transvestite AIDS patients, traveled the city of São Paulo in search of information and resources, and faced a draconian medical bureaucracy; and she did it with community funding, her own efforts and donations from other travestis. These were the early years of the AIDS crisis and anti-travesti hatred was reaching terrifying proportions. This was the Brazil of re-democratization and, in the brief interval between 1983 and 1988, what was at stake was the definition of which subjects would or would not count as citizens under the new Brazilian Constitution. This was essentially a redefinition of what would be “human” in the realm of democracy: for whom democracy would show itself as a promise of emancipation and for whom it would show itself as the actualization of a predatory terrorism.

In 1987, the state of São Paulo promoted one of the country’s most notorious acts of anti-trans terror: Operation Tarantula, which united both the police and the population in a hunt for

Chilean transvestite Claudia Rodriguez once said that “for real travestis, the State cannot exist”¹⁹.

This is when I come to speak to you as an anarchist who faces the multiple contradictions of travesti-trans activism with institutionality. I am an anarchist who produces part of her political agency at university, which requires me to negotiate with institutions by prioritizing the concrete demands of trans people — while at the same time remaining fully aware of the impossibility of institutionally negotiating our lives. I want to say what I have to ask of you, cisgender anarchists.

The realism of travesti-trans lives is brutal: we are used to an imaginary of conflict, violence and death. Our radicalism is present, and it never goes away, because it comes from the most instinctive need to survive. But this radicalism, like any radicalism, needs to be nurtured and protected against the onslaughts of co-optation, demobilization and death — we need the autonomous organizational structures that will allow us to resist institutions with more strength than we have now. The vulnerability of trans life regarding social hatred forces us to see ourselves as existences under attack from all directions, in all politics — from fascism to conservatism to feminism and the dynamics of the LGBT movement itself to liberalism and left-wing radicalism — it seems that it is politics itself that is against us.

In this way, one of our main challenges is to overcome the affection that the intellectual travesti Leila Dumaesq referred to as the “subsistence fetish” (2013) — the willingness to do anything

¹⁹ See: VERGUEIRO, Viviane. Por inflexões decoloniais de corpos e identidades de gênero inconformes: uma análise autoetnográfica da cisgeneridade como normatividade. Dissertação (mestrado) — Universidade Federal da Bahia, Instituto de Humanidades, Artes e Ciências Professor Milton Santos, Salvador, 2015, p. 200. Avaliable in: <https://repositorio.ufba.br/bitstream/ri/19685/1/VERGUEIRO%20Viviane%20-%20Por%20inflexoes%20decoloniais%20de%20corpos%20e%20identidades%20de%20genero%20incon> Access in: 07.29.2023.

world: a new political consciousness, guided by a concrete sense of responsibility for our fragile lives. This travesti radicalism understands that there is no justice for transfeminicide, because neither the State nor cisgender society can bring back the countless travestis they have killed.

We're back to the elections and the rhetoric of our democracy, to the semiotically saturated scenes where the president walks up the ramp with sexual and gender minorities [although not a single travesti], "receives" his power from black women and appoints ministers who invite trans people to take on positions in their administrations. After the reaction of Bolsonaro supporters against Lula's election, by invading the presidential palace and congress, the president-elect declared that "The first thing we have to be clear about is that the extreme right exists today all over the world. Now, what we need is to defeat this fascist narrative in Brazil"¹⁷. While the State deployed its police apparatus to "combat" fascism, the news that "Trans prisoners are removed from cells in Colmeia to accommodate Bolsonaro supporters" went almost unnoticed¹⁸. Somewhere beyond the anti-fascist rhetoric of our new democracy project, we can see, as vivid and dense as ever, the atmosphere of social death that the prison and cis-supremacist State continues to project against trans lives. So then, let's be honest and say that fascism doesn't threaten our democracy — in fact, they have been quite comfortable together in the spaces where democracy is naturally fascist: in prison, in the peripheries, in the precariousness of labor, and in the biopolitical management of dissident bodies.

¹⁷ Available in: <https://g1.globo.com/politica/blog/natuza-nery/post/2023/01/18/fiquei-com-a-impressao-que-era-o-comeco-de-um-golpe-de-estado-diz-lula-sobre-atos-terroristas-em-brasilia.ghtml>. Access in: 07.29.2023.

¹⁸ Available in: <https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2023/01/18/rotina-presidios-df-chegada-bolsonaristas.htm#:~:text=Mulheres%20trans%20e%20travestis%20presas,das%20sedes%20dos%20> Access in: 07.29.2023.

travestis which involved imprisonment, torture and executions (CAVALCANTI et. al, 2018). The operation had repercussions all across the country. Anti-AIDS, anti-bicha⁴ and anti-travesti hatred and fear amounted to a brutal sanitary policy of the State. But here we come to the crossroads: just a year after Operation Tarantula, in 1988, Brenda Lee's house was hired as a "branch" of the Institute of Infectious Diseases of the Emílio Ribas Hospital, signing an agreement with the São Paulo State Health Department, providing palliative care for travestis who were AIDS patients, "social patients" who had no families or homes to be sent to, and other HIV patients. Working with the State, however, destroyed the autonomous political potential of this community-based activism, taking away Brenda's autonomy:

Of course, now that the government has stepped in, things have clearly changed. "We're no longer a community," Brenda comments with a bit of nostalgia in her voice. "We're a home specifically for people with AIDS." New arrivals at the house must be authorized by the state Health Department, and they are not always travestis. Brenda has to report regularly to the Secretary (ADAMS, 1990, s/p.).

Brenda's travesti action, oriented towards community care, was instrumentalized by the State as a way of finding cheap labor for a nursing service that no one wanted to do. This action was depoliticized by the need to tear up its community base in order to sustain itself as a service, holding precarious and marginalized people responsible for putting an end to forms of political organization and labor that kept their own precariousness and marginalization unchallenged.

⁴ Translator's note: the word "bicha", in the Brazilian context, can be assimilated to the word "queer". It popularly refers to people considered to be feminine, flamboyant homosexual men, and can be used in a pejorative way, but the term has since been appropriated by the LGBTIA+ community.

The social death of travestis took hold at the same time as initial homosexual or “LGBT” inclusion began. While the de-pathologization of homosexuality took place in the 1990s, the trans-travesti pathologization intensified. Throughout the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, the definitive separation between homosexuals, transsexuals and travestis took place between the disputes of two State apparatuses: the health system defined performative criteria to separate — through the identification of the desire to engage with hormonal and surgical technologies mediated by the State — “real” transsexuals from travestis. In this respect, Thelma Lipp’s speech in 1988, when answering the question “Thelma, what is a travesti and why aren’t you one?” seems paradigmatic here:

A travesti is a caricature of a woman. I am not a caricature, I am a woman. A travesti is exaggeration, huge hips, very large breasts, huge cheekbones, abrupt gestures, an undefined thing that is neither man nor woman, you look and you see that it’s a man dressed as a woman, who has a completely different head, who goes out on the street to attract attention, to let people know that he’s a travesti [...].⁵

At the same time, public “security” forces separated travestis from homosexuals through visual identification associated with an imaginary of criminality. The 1987 statement of João Mascarenhas, founder of *Lampião da Esquina*, to the National Constituent Assembly is perhaps paradigmatic in this respect:

According to him, there is the common homosexual and there is the travesti, who in many cases are pros-

⁵ This line can be found in the documentary: MEIER, Pierre-Alain; KÄLIN, Matthias. *Sorrows of Love*. Switzerland-Brazil: Amidon Paterson Film Genève & Jürg Müller Film São Paulo, 1988. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7eO00w5g9o>> Accessed on 28/07/2023.

ist groups in society that stigmatize and demonize trans identities” (2021).

This approach to transfemicide rejects the privatization of anti-trans violence as an infringement of rights by an individual agent of violence, and blames its cis-themic, organized dimension, codified in the apparatuses of the State.

For RATTs-PE, this teenager was not the only transfemicide: every institution that abandoned both him and Roberta, every police officer and agent of the State, every politician and public figure who operated and organized anti-trans hatred in their bases, every expression of hatred committed travesticide together.

The fiction of a crime, an anti-discrimination law, or even an individualistic conception of “transphobia” are completely incapable of grasping the complexity of this occurrence. In the words of Caia Maria Coelho, intellectual travesti and RATTs activist:

LGBTphobia is a political, social, scientific and religious issue. It is important to consider that it is not, ontologically, a crime. It has been criminalized. Obviously, every crime has gone through a process of criminalization, but this is soon forgotten, as the solution to violence is outsourced to the law, and “crime” becomes synonymous to “problem”. Narrowly defining LGBTphobia as a “crime”, which restricts the possibilities of defining it along several other strands, obstructs the chances of understanding and overcoming it (MARTINS and COELHO, 2022).

Fighting LGBTphobia means disputing an entire social, cultural and political project at its roots, not just in the economy or in authority, but within desire. This is a bigger and more complex process than the most common ideas of revolution. Our role and our desire in social movements must start from there.

RATTs’ demand is probably one of the most radical and overwhelming in the trans-travesti movement towards the cisgender

ogy of power, this positive Human Rights technology, a technology of administrative violence.

These exclusions, less explicit than what we recognize as a crime of LGBTphobia, but no less brutal, drive the trans-travesti person into a more intense cycle of exclusions and violence. Analyzing the most intense exclusions, such as family exclusion, intellectual black travesti Bruna Benevides (2021) states that this cycle “leads trans people to marginalization and, consequently, to death, either due to a lack of access to fundamental, social and political rights, or due to the State’s failure to guarantee the social well-being of this population.” I would also like to recommend that everyone here read the theoretical production that takes place in ANTRA’s annual reports, which goes far beyond simply counting and processing data on murders, but which conceptualizes the operation of transphobia in Brazil.

This brings us back to the scene of a murdered black travesti, but now in 2021. I’m talking about Roberta Nascimento, a homeless travesti, who was set on fire by an underage youth, without discretion, in the middle of a public space.

Following the frightening wave of transfemicides in the state of Pernambuco in 2021, the Rede Autônoma de Pessoas Trans e Travestis de Pernambuco [Autonomous Network of Trans People and Travestis of Pernambuco] (RATTS-PE) drafted a letter of proposal to the state’s executive branch. A key feature of the RATTS activists’ commitment is that, despite directly addressing so-called hate crimes, their conceptualization of what happened and of transphobia did not resort to the pact of the prison-industrial complex and the prison State. Instead of conceptualizing transfemicides as merely “criminals”, the document describes the young man who set fire to Roberta Nascimento’s body, for example, as “[...] a sick teenager forgotten by the State, who instrumentalized transphobia against the victim’s body, in accordance with the structural and institutional hatred spread by conservative and fundamental-

titutes and end up getting involved in petty theft or drugs. The image predominantly attributed to the homosexual would actually reflect the travesti and this would hinder the organized movement. (MASCARENHAS apud CARVALHO; CARRARA, 2013, p. 320)

Both Thelma Lipp and João Mascarenhas are white people, their speeches echoing an implicit racial imaginary of marginalization that would eventually lead to the use of artisanal transition technologies or the criminality of “the” (sic) travestis.

The second scenario I want to address is more diffuse, and is still connected to the intense police persecution against travestis and cisgender prostitutes dating from the military regime to the present day. In particular, the State’s persecution against radically body-centered experiences in which, as the Argentinian travesti Lohana Berkins states, “it’s the body for life, the body for struggle, the body for everything” (BERKINS, 2000). This focus on the body, especially on non-legitimized practices of body modification and the use of the body’s sexual potential as a way of producing subsistence, is pursued by somatophobic policing, policing that seeks to alienate women and dissident people from their own bodies. In an extract by the travesti Martinha about her experience under the military regime, she said that the police had arrested her “because she had breasts”. This idea of crime being embodied is partly what defines the travesti experience in the security system and also in the labor force. The protests by the travesti Indianarae Siqueira, in which she shows her breasts in public spaces and is arrested on charges of a “female” crime, despite being recognized in her documents as a man, highlights this history⁶.

You see, the focus on the making of the body, the intense labor over the body and through the body of the experiences of travesti prostitutes tends to separate them from their working class identity.

⁶ See Indianarae Siqueira’s narrative in: (VIEIRA & BAGAGLI, 2018, p. 335).

Argentinian travesti Marlene Wayar says that to consider whores as workers according to the strict definition in Capital is to consider that someone applies surplus value to their bodies, and they have no interest in a life of pimping⁷. Her proposal is that

We are the ones who demonstrate that this is not the case, that the land belongs to us, because in this case, the land is the body itself. No one can say “your body belongs to me”, “everything you work on or do with your body is mine” or “you must give me surplus value”. Impossible. No one can say that they own the knowledge, the means of production, the work in prostitution; because it is intuitive, because it is what is taken, because it is what we carry, what we know. (IURIS DICTIO, 2019, s/p.)

Whores and travestis are not “workers”, they are lumpemproletariat, they are marginal masses, they are out of the production process, they are not workers — but they work, indeed. And hard! This one-dimensional and masculinized perspective on the issue of labour has been one of the main reasons why the experiences of sex workers and trans people are unassimilable for the hegemonic left. Not being workers, it is thought that prostitutes and travestis, most of whom are excluded from the formal labor scene, have no political conscience. But I would like to evoke the historical image recovered by Caia Maria Coelho, of 300 travestis protesting against the murder of one of their sisters in front of a police station in Pernambuco, 1984⁸, and ask if travestis and prostitutes have no political conscience. Long live the college of whoring, says Indianarae.

⁷ See: WAYAR, 2019. Available in: <https://revistas.usfq.edu.ec/index.php/iurisdicio/article/view/1563> Acessado em: 23/07/2023.

⁸ The image — a clipping from a Recife newspaper — was recovered by Caia’s research and personal collection and made available on her social networks.

of this violence against our genders, which are seen as incoherent and even impossible — a de-gendering violence — which also removes citizenship and humanity in the process. In this position of being absorbed into institutions, but always as a problem, always as an unknown, always as a workaround, we are immobilized. This unjudgeable, unmanageable and ungovernable body is then abandoned. This led trans philosopher Paul Preciado (2020) to compare the status of a trans person to that of an illegal immigrant. Those of us who are lucky and have greater access to resources and security because we were not thrown out of our homes, who work outside of prostitution and are in higher education — and here I include myself — still have to face the inevitable violence of transphobia and fight against the demobilizing forces of institutions that seek to silence our radicalism.

I can only agree with Joy James, for whom “As police violence and homicides in Brazil indicate, the paradox of guaranteeing some rights but denying life itself has never been structurally addressed by either liberals or progressives”¹⁵. You see, what stabilizes our democracy in front of the legitimate demands of the new collective citizens, especially the pedagogical demands of the Brazilian travesti and transgender movement¹⁶, is the inclusion of social struggles in this predatory logic of the State that has learned to undertake death projects against trans-travesti lives while maintaining its democratic façade. This allows institutions to be as authoritarian and violent as they want, as long as the violence is sufficiently veiled, as long as responsibility can be removed from the State and transferred to civil society in a privatizing way. It is a new technol-

¹⁵ JAMES, Joy; ALVES, Jaime Amparo. States of Security, Democracy’s Sanctuary, and Captive Maternal in Brazil and the United States. *Souls*, v. 20, n. 4, pp. 345–367, 2018.

¹⁶ On the pedagogical nature of the Brazilian travesti and transsexual movement, see: PASSOS, Maria Clara Araújo dos. *Pedagogias das travestilidades*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2022.

protecting them; the lack of structure in most institutions to receive the new trans “rights” that have been instituted; and perhaps most recently, this new identity document that represents a step backwards in the recognition of trans identities¹⁴. Especially now, I would like to point out that up to 69 anti-trans bills were presented in 2023 alone, some of which were approved following a frightening international fascist wave; in a way that anti-trans legislation coexists quietly with the criminalization of LGBTphobia in Brazil — you should see here that I am talking about a State that institutes certain rights for a population, but does so without ever changing the structures of its bureaucratic and administrative apparatus based on a logic of systemic aggression and annihilation of that same population. In this current “State” of affairs, trans-travesti humanity becomes hostage to public policies that are subject to dismantling, bureaucratic rituals and administrative games. And what this process does, more often than not, is to annul trans-travesti political agency by murdering citizenship.

This is pretty much what we mean when we evoke the concept of “cisgenderity”. You see, gender is a central category in the organization of social institutions and the administrative and bureaucratic apparatus of the State. You don’t walk down the street without gender, you don’t have a relationship without gender, you don’t have a document without gender, you don’t receive aid or benefit from a public policy without gender, and you don’t take part in a social movement or a revolutionary struggle without gender. Gender defines whether you are a violent or violated person, public or private, caregiver or cared for, gender defines how our strength is expropriated, how the police regulate us, which devices of punishment and control apply to us, how we relate to systems of knowledge and recognition. Non-cisgender people are the target

¹⁴ See: Diagnóstico sobre o acesso à retificação de nome e gênero de travestis e demais pessoas trans no Brasil / ANTRA (Associação Nacional de Travestis e Transexuais) – Brasília, DF: Distrito Drag, 2022.

Another historical scenario brings us back to the figure of Lula. It was during the Lula and Dilma governments, following the 3 National LGBT Conferences in 2008, 2011 and 2016, that the main decisions affecting the current situation of trans life were made. It was through their experience as targets and multipliers of public health policies that Brazilian travestis and transsexuals were able to nationalize their movement and build their first successful claims for rights, as traviarca⁹ Jovanna Baby (2021) recalls. However, this process has made us “hostages” of the health systems — a status that has already been described as “SIDAdanization”, with an S, in reference to the Brazilian acronym for AIDS, where transvestites and transsexuals have been given a semi-citizen status by being held responsible for the health crisis; and as “surgical citizenship”, considering that trans-travesti people have been subjected to the requirement to enter the transsexualizing process in SUS¹⁰ in order to achieve existential, social and political legitimacy. Even after the long struggles to reform the health system that led to the publication of the National LGBT Integrated Health Policy in 2011, trans health often requires the biopolitical classification of travestis as delicate psychopathological cases and/or potential HIV/AIDS vectors that must be properly monitored and controlled by the State, in such a way that this concern often takes precedence over the subject’s integral health — undermining the trans-travesti’s right to bodily autonomy due to the State’s monopoly on health and gender technologies. These fictions update a ciscolonial construction of the virulence of the travesti body — especially the black travesti body — brilliantly described by the intellectual black travesti Mariah Rafaela Silva (SILVA, 2021b). The recent anti-trans political vocabulary, which evokes the notion of a “trans epidemic”, presents itself as frightening evidence.

⁹ Translator’s note: the word “traviarca” in Portuguese refers to a combination of “travesti” and “matriarca” — matriarch.

¹⁰ Translator’s note: in Brazil, SUS stands for Sistema Único de Saúde — Unified Health System.

For those excluded from the health system, the artisanal use of transition technologies, in the absence of health education and the pharmaceutical industry's interest, is permeated by risks. But these structuring moments find their terrifying renewal in the current political situation.

The historical moment we are discussing is the here and now, in the "aftermath" of Bolsonaro, perceiving the full impact of the intense dismantling of the main paths for building trans-travesti policies, and the intentional destruction of ambulatories, councils, programs, and other State policies (See: REDE TRANS BRASIL, 2023). The trans-travesti movement's dependence on this State overture has significantly reduced our autonomy. The situation of trans-travesti shelters in Brazil is perhaps the best illustration of this situation: one can consider the implications of the pandemic-era eviction of CasaNem by a battalion of the Military Police and the Municipal Guard in 2020, followed by the interruption of the project's sheltering axis in the coming years. The institutionalization and NGOization¹¹ of the trans-travesti movement are predatory styles of the State and private initiative. Here, the care needed to guarantee trans and travesti survival is being preyed upon. It's about capturing, making dependent, demobilizing and removing from social and political life.

I do not mean to present this argument as some kind of criticism that rejects the direction and decisions of the trans-travesti movement so far. These decisions are made consciously and with the aim of ensuring the group's survival. It is thanks to these decisions that a young intellectual travesti, a university student travesti, a living travesti can speak to you today. But we need to be aware of the perpetual updating of violence and exclusions.

In 2016, the right to a Social Name was instituted within the entire federal public administration, and in 2018, the right to rec-

¹¹ On the practical and ethical problems of NGOization of social movements, see Gohn (1997) and Spade (2020).

tify one's name and gender in registry offices without presenting medical reports was guaranteed. Although these are significant advances for our lives, I believe that these recognition policies represent a more complex field of dangers.

You see, the more explicit anti-trans exclusions and state violence, especially after the Yogyakarta principles and again with the debates on the criminalization of LGBTphobia in 2016, have come to be represented as democratic aberrations, actions that are not compatible with the functions of liberal Nation-States. But these exclusions have not disappeared. I would like, thinking like the American trans anarchist Dean Spade¹², to argue that anti-trans exclusions and violence have been codified by the State into our own conquests, through a sophistication of bureaucratic apparatuses.

I don't have the time here to analyze each case in detail. But I can name a few issues that bother me: the legal-administrative limbo in which people find themselves in the process of rectifying their name and gender, and the often erroneous and violent application of the social name policy by cisgender agents¹³; the violent application of anti-discrimination laws, which have often turned against trans and travesti students in schools, rather than

¹² On Spade's concept of "administrative violence," he says: "Rather than focusing on changing the law in ways that are supposed to declare the equality and value of trans people's lives but in fact prove to have little impact on the everyday lives of the people they are supposed to protect, a distributive analysis suggests a focus on the laws and policies that produce systemic norms and regularities that make trans people's lives administratively impossible. I will specifically discuss three areas of law and policy that have a very significant impact on the lives of trans people: rules governing the classification of gender in identity, rules governing the sexual segregation of key institutions (shelters, group homes, jails, prisons, restrooms), and rules governing access to gender-affirmative health care for trans people." (2015, p. 12).

¹³ On this, see the report of Rede Trans UERJ in: BARBOSA, Angie de Lima Santos; SANTOS, Lori Araújo Delarue dos. Desaprendendo a Univer(cis)dade: A Ação da Rede Trans UERJ. Notícias, Revista Docência e Cibercultura, Janeiro de 2023, online. ISSN: 2594-9004. Available in: <<https://www.epublicacoes.uerj.br/index.php/re-doc/announcement/view/1566>>. Access in: 29/07/2023